

## The Ancients Museum Education Kit

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### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- distinguish petroglyphs from pictographs,
- create their own “rock art” and evaluate each other’s symbols,
- theorize on the importance of rock art to ancient people,
- describe how rock art vandalism has a negative impact on our understanding of history.

### Connection to Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- 3rd grade: 1.1b, 1.2b, 1.2c
- 4th grade: 1.1.d, 1.2.c

**Materials:** Red tempera paint (washable), containers for paint (small bowls or lids), paint brushes (optional), brown or tan colored construction paper, old newspaper to cover work areas, transparency sheet or plastic film cover, dry erase marker, Visit with Respect hand-out, pictures of rock art from *Rock Art and Cultures of the Colorado Plateau* <https://museumofwesternco.com/rock-art/>

**Time:** 2 class periods

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## Background

Rock art is one of man’s oldest forms of communication and one of the most universal. Rock art can be found on every continent except for Antarctica and some rock art sites in Europe have been dated as far back as 30,000 years old. By studying the images that our ancestors have left behind, we can get a fascinating and intimate glimpse into our past. The carved and painted images, both very old and very recent, show us what was important, what everyday life was like, and can draw a clear line to how we live our lives today.

The Colorado Plateau is one of the greatest places in the entire world to see and study rock art. The abundance of sandstone cliffs has created thousands of ideal canvases for petroglyphs and rock overhangs have protected painted images for thousands of years. Over 10,000 years of cultural habitation and contemporary Native American groups such as the Navajo and Ute have left thousands of images, making the region an intriguing mix of different ages and styles.

For more information on the styles of rock art found in the Colorado Plateau and for photos to use during this lesson, please visit the following online exhibit: *Rock Art and Cultures of the Colorado Plateau* <https://museumofwesternco.com/rock-art/>

## Suggested Procedure:

### 1st Class Period:

1. Engage the class by asking students for examples of different types of art they can think of that they see today and why art might be important.
2. After discussing the different types of art that students are familiar with, explain that ancient cultures also created art.
  - a. Use the rock art photos from *Rock Art and Cultures of the Colorado Plateau* <https://museumofwestern-co.com/rock-art/> to explain the difference between the two most common types of rock art in the Colorado Plateau—petroglyphs and pictograph.
  - b. Explain that different cultures produced different styles of art that can be distinguished from one another, but they share common themes—abstract symbols, representational symbols, human-like symbols, and animal-like symbols.
  - c. Have students identify the different types of symbols in the rock art photos.
3. Ask students to discuss why they think ancient people created rock art.
  - a. Possible ideas include: to communicate ideas or use as maps, religious ceremonies, astronomy, hunting guides
  - b. In many cases, we do not know the meaning of the symbols or the purpose of the rock art (However, the Ute and other indigenous peoples are still around and can offer insight into the meaning of their rock art)
4. Have students discuss what they think archaeologist can learn from the rock art (possible answers: what was important to people at the time, what everyday life was like, what ancient people have in common with us today)
5. Discuss with students the types of symbols they would use if they were wanted to communicate with people in the future.

### 2nd Class Period:

**Prepare ahead of time:** Obtain washable red tempera paint, containers for paint, paint brushes, old newspaper, and tan or brown colored construction paper. Cover the students' work area with newspaper and pour red paint into small containers for students to use.

1. Explain to the class that they will get a chance to create their own rock art today using paint and construction paper that will represent sandstone.
  - a. Ask them if they are making petroglyphs or pictographs (correct answer: pictograph)
  - b. Before they begin, they should think about the types of information they want to represent with their art.

2. Although the paint used for this project should be washable, instruct students to be careful not to spill paint or get it on each other's clothes.
3. Ancient people used their hands or paint brushes made from animal hair or yucca fibers to create pictographs. Students should be encouraged to choose the method they feel most comfortable using.
4. After students have created their rock art, ask several volunteers to display their work
  - a. First ask the rest of the class if they can guess what the symbols represent
  - b. Then, ask the artist to explain his or her artwork
5. Choose one of the volunteers and use their rock art to teach the importance of protecting rock art. Ideally, the paint should be completely dry for this step
  - a. Cover the art with a transparency sheet and draw "graffiti" over the original art using a dry erase marker.
  - b. Ask the student how he or she feels about what happened to his or her artwork.
  - c. Show the class photos of rock art that has been vandalized and ask how they think ancient people would feel if they saw the graffiti covering their art.
  - d. Ask the class why they think people might vandalize rock art.
  - e. Ask students how this might negatively impact the story that archaeologists work to uncover.
  - f. Discuss with the class what they can do to help prevent this.
6. Finally, have students brainstorm as a class and make a list of things they can do to respect and take care of the land. After the discussion, distribute the Visit with Respect handout.

**Extension:**

Ask students to write a letter to a fictitious person who has vandalized rock art and explain to them why that is inappropriate. Have students practice an empathetic tone.



## Visit with Respect

Archaeological sites and artifacts are integral to American history and sacred to many Native American people. By treading softly and leaving things as we find them, we show respect for those who came before us and those who will visit these places after us.

What you can do to protect ancient and sacred places:

- » **LEAVE ALL ARTIFACTS:** Keep discovery alive. Leave all artifacts where you find them so the next person can share the experience. It's illegal to move or take any artifact from public lands.
- » **DO NOT TOUCH ROCK ART OR MAKE YOUR OWN:** Vandalism of petroglyphs and pictographs erases stories of ancient people and destroys the experience for future visitors
- » **STEER CLEAR OF WALLS:** Historic and prehistoric structures can be easily damaged. Please refrain from touching, leaning, standing or climbing on any structures, no matter how solid it looks.
- » **TEACH KIDS RESPECT:** Archaeological sites are not playgrounds. Please teach children respect. Keep a close eye so kids don't get hurt or accidentally damage the site.
- » **KEEP PETS AT A DISTANCE:** To prevent digging and erosion, pets are not allowed in archaeological sites. Please make sure pets are leashed away from the site.
- » **CAMP & EAT OUTSIDE:** Camping, fires and food at archaeological sites can attract critters and damage the site.
- » **AVOID BUILDING CAIRNS:** Keep the landscape natural by leaving only footprints. Cairns increase impacts on sensitive sites and are frequently constructed with artifacts like grinding or shrine stones.